

Advertisers need to grow a pair

 By [Chris Mberdyk](#)

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Almost 20 years ago, I suggested that there was an enormous opportunity waiting for advertisers and their agencies with the vaguest semblance of balls.

I have come to conclusion that most ad agencies, clients and marketers are a bunch of eunuchs.

I suggested then they should take advantage of the fact that South Africa wallowed, as it does today, somewhere down at the bottom of the global barrel when it comes to customer service.

At that time, again, as it is today, it seemed as though the vast majority of client briefings to agencies included the instruction that under no circumstances should any advertising be permitted to make any promises or commit the manufacturer, retailer or service provider to anything that might come flying back in their faces?

But, in fact, no one had actually given any thought to the benefits of putting an advertisers' reputation on the line. And today this is still seen as far too great a risk to take.

What about a promise or two?

However, 20 years ago, ad agencies were just starting to feel the pinch of tough times and very few were prepared to do anything other than what clients wanted. Heaven forbid they should rock the boat with suggestions of clients actually promising the consumer something.

Now, this is no longer just an opportunity for an agency that has the guts to stand up to its client and insist on including something in the ad that will act as a firecracker up the backsides of those who have to deliver the goods. No, it's not just an opportunity, but rather something that is becoming more and more essential to the majority of agencies find themselves having literally to share in their clients' successes and failures.

What I'm talking about is advertising in which the client promises to do something.

Advertising that commits retailers, dealers, service providers to a specific course of action. Not just advertising that motivates consumers but kicks butt all the way down the internal corporate line.

You want a test drive? Tough

For example, how often does this happen with the launch of a new car? Expensive ad campaigns go to inordinate lengths to catch the eye of a prospective buyer and cajole him or her to call in at their nearest dealer for a test drive. How disappointing when the excited and enthusiastic potential customer does exactly that only to be greeted by a salesman who doesn't bother to take his feet off his desk, let alone stand up and who says, "Sorry I don't have any demo vehicles right now, come back tomorrow."

What I'm suggesting is that somewhere in the ad should be something that lights a fire under the salesman. Something like, "If your nearest dealer doesn't immediately arrange a test drive call me, give me his name," signed by the managing director.

Now the usual reason no managing director will agree is because they're worried about having to answer customer calls all day. But the point is the phone won't ring because when there is something potentially career-inhibiting like that in an ad, salesmen will get to hear about it one way or the other and make damn sure they don't have their feet on the desk while an irate customer is dialling the managing director on his cell phone.

While advertising is great at persuading customers to do things they all fall flat when it comes to motivating sales people.

Make it specific, and deliverable - and then deliver

There are myriad more examples. Hotel ads that offer free accommodation if service isn't up to scratch. But not a generalised sort of statement - it needs to be specific - if reception is not up to scratch, if room service doesn't deliver within 10 minutes... something measurable.

Service providers, in particular those that invite business by telephone, stand to benefit the most by including this sort of motivation in their advertising.

The trick is to do it in such a way that guilty parties can't point fingers. Even to the point, where possible, of including the names and perhaps even photos of front-line managers and service people in advertisements.

The potential is limitless.

Of course it has been done before in this country but in a rather non-committal way. Where people can call toll-free or consumer 'hot lines' if service is not up to scratch. But in every case it has been too generalised. The company as such has elected to carry the can.

What needs to happen is that individuals need to be affected. Jobs need to be put on the line. Careers need to be at stake.

ABOUT CHRIS MOERDYK

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